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Technical cooperation in statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Working Group a selected portion of the report of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics, held at Voorburg, the Netherlands, from 8 to 10 September 1997, consisting of draft guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation, which is contained in the annex. The other parts of the report will be before the Working Group as a background document. Two workshops were held at Voorburg to develop the report, in line with the decision by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session on the holding of a seminar/symposium on good practices related to technical cooperation.[1]

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), para. 75 (b).

* E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.1

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Annex

Report of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics: draft guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation

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I. Introduction

1. At its twenty-ninth session (New York, 11 to 14 February 1997), the Statistical Commission decided that the topic of technical cooperation should be discussed in detail in separate meetings. Accordingly, in April and September 1997, Statistics Netherlands convened two meetings of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics at Voorburg, the Netherlands, at which a number of papers and contributions were considered. On the basis of those papers and the discussions held, a report was drafted to be presented to the regional commissions in 1997-1998 and to the Statistical Commission in 1999 for further discussions with a view to eventually developing draft guiding principles for approval by the Commission.

2. The present first draft of the guiding principles (or recommendations) for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics has been prepared as a proposal for further discussion on the basis of the work of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation. The guiding principles should help partners in the technical cooperation process to create the best possible models and practices of technical cooperation. They should also stimulate the national authorities of the recipient countries to commit themselves to improving the national statistical system, such as by guaranteeing the availability of adequate staff, equipment and management. Recipient Governments, for their part, should stimulate the optimal use of statistics in their own countries. The principles set out below are based on widely agreed areas of discussion, including checklists of other/more detailed considerations.

II. General policy

3. It is the task of the national statistical system to provide relevant and reliable statistical information on the economic, social and cultural developments in a country.

4. The more precise formulation of the kind of information to be produced should rely on well balanced communication between users and producers.

5. The producers of statistical information should play an active role in the formulation of the work programme.

III. Important preconditions

6. For cooperation to be effective, the following preconditions should be met:

(a) Commitment of the national authorities;

(b) A workable legal and institutional setting;

(c) Commitment of the recipient organization;

(d) Availability of adequate and motivated staff;

(e) Availability of basic housing, software and equipment;

(f) Availability of an involved management of the national statistical system;

(g) Awareness of the fundamental principles of official statistics.

IV. Goals and success criteria for technical cooperation

7. Different players involved in technical cooperation typically have different goals and therefore different criteria for judging the success of technical cooperation.

8. The design of technical cooperation projects should involve all main stakeholders, and should identify common, possibly multiple goals. Success can then be measured in terms of whether the predetermined objectives are achieved.

9. The following main (dimensions of) goals have been identified:

(a) Increased and *better use* of *better statistics* in key areas in order to provide the basis for policy, planning, decision-making and the monitoring of social, economic and environmental development and investment decisions;

(b) *Increased statistical capacity and capabilities* to produce statistics in priority areas, and the production of such statistics;

(c) The *ability to sustain and develop* systems and capabilities in the longer term.

10. In the course of the process, intermediate goals for the various actions need to be formulated.

V. Good practice for technical cooperation

11. Many participants agreed that technical cooperation should:

(a) Be demand-led, based on assessments of user requirements and relative priorities, including national, regional and international needs;

(b) Be set within a well balanced overall strategic framework and work programme for national statistical development;

(c) Consider human and other resource development strategies, and organizational and institutional development needs, as well as technical work areas;

(d) Be flexible and take account of local situations, culture, language, policy environments and stage of statistical development;

(e) Ensure government commitment and complement national resources, while empowering recipient national statistical systems and Governments to take the lead;

(f) Address the needs of regional groupings of countries where a common approach can be effective, while recognizing that the heterogeneity of countries means that they have many different needs and priorities, even in producing similar outputs. Regional technical cooperation programmes might support cooperation *between* and/or *within* regional groupings;

(g) Be well designed and implemented, for instance by using logical and conceptual framework approaches, including specifying objectives and success criteria in advance, and considering wider issues beyond the immediate scope of an individual project;

(h) Promote full participation and address the concerns of all main stakeholders;

(i) Use appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to facilitate effective project implementation, exchange of experience and lesson learning;

(j) Be coordinated between donors and between different players in the national statistical system in a proactive way to avoid duplication of effort and encourage complementarity and synergy;

(k) Recognize that developing a statistical system can take a long time.

VI. Checklist of specific measures or issues to be considered

12. A suggested checklist of specific measures or issues to be considered is set out below.

User needs and priorities

1. Identify needs of key users and determine priorities.
2. Establish mechanisms to decide on priorities and resolve conflicts.
3. Ensure that international needs and the advantages of harmonized statistical outputs do not override national needs.
4. Establish constructive dialogue with users and funding organization of statistical programmes; user-producer and/or statistical advisory committees can assist in such processes.

Statistical work programme and resource needs

5. Establish statistical work programmes and strategies to guide the allocation of resources.
6. Define outputs, activities, inputs and resource gaps.

Strategies for delivery of work programmes

7. Formate human resource development strategies.
8. Formulate information systems and dissemination strategies.
9. Consider legal status and formulate organizational and communication strategies.

Logical framework approach

10. Link inputs to the associated activities that deliver the outputs and the immediate and final objectives of technical cooperation.
11. Establish indicators of success and monitoring mechanisms at the outset, together with an assessment of external factors affecting a project, especially the risk factors that could kill its objectives.
12. Ensure that the means of monitoring and evaluation are produced jointly by the main stakeholders.

Role of technical cooperation

13. Ensure that it complements national resources and commitments.
14. Ensure that it is time-bound, with realistic "exit" strategies.
15. Ensure that it supports national statistical development plans and associated strategies.
16. Ensure that it is led and coordinated by recipient/partner national statistical institutions and Governments.

17. Bear in mind that the role of technical experts is to advise and assist, sharing skills, information and experience with partners.

VII. Implementation

13. The design, planning and execution of cooperation activities should be completed according to professional standards.

14. Different kinds of cooperation models should be examined to select the most appropriate model, so that, for example, models could be based on the needs of:

(a) A single country with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures;

(b) A group of countries (regional approach) with one or more donor/provider partner(s), working either independently or in joint ventures;

(c) Any combination of recipient countries and/or groups of countries with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures.

15. A structured approach, possibly with the use of some form of conceptual framework for implementation, is needed.

16. The training of staff needs to be integrated into project design in a way that optimizes its effect on the objectives of the project.

VIII. Checklist of factors that influence the implementation process

17. A checklist of factors that influence the implementation process is set out below.

Factors affecting absorption capacity

1. Draft a contract to formalize the intended inputs by all partners in the technical cooperation process.
2. Adopt a flexible approach in order to adapt to changing circumstances.
3. Draft intermediate outputs to provide relevant project documentation.
4. Develop and use supporting tools and disseminate them throughout the organization.
5. Give continued attention to the user-producer dialogue.
6. Make internal coordination a priority in order to stimulate the involvement of the rest of the organization.
7. Create internal working groups to support the process of internal coordination.
8. Give constant attention to institutional developments to support the adoption process.

Factors that affect inputs by the various partners

9. Make institutional responsibility for technical cooperation a part of the contract so as to strengthen the professional basis for the partnership in technical cooperation.
10. Ensure long-term commitment in the case that providers need to be deeply involved.

11. Ensure adequate quality of staff.

12. Ensure flexibility from the input side as well.

13. Avoid hierarchical communications.

14. Make empathy and understanding culture a priority in view of the need for acceptability.

15. Bear in mind that speaking the language and a positive atmosphere make communication much easier.

16. Ensure the predictability of volume and the timing of actions in order to realize planning and support commitment.

17. Support professionalism by providing clear project management without an excess of managers.

18. Ensure adequate training programmes that target correct staff and focus on short practical training.

19. Use regional approaches, either to exchange information between recipients or as a form of cooperation, in a responsible way.

20. Use e-mail and other communication tools to speed up the communication process.

Agreement of partners on taxonomy of projects

21. Ensure that partners agree on the characteristics of the project: size, duration, location(s), financial characteristics, subject, scope, organization and expected results.

22. Ensure that partners agree on the characteristics of the factors of production: the people involved and their status; their familiarity with the culture of the country/organization and language; their level of expertise (specialist or generalist); resident or visiting status; the kind of equipment and manuals that will be used; and the role of training (advice can be given in a diagnostic way as evaluations or audits).

IX. Monitoring and evaluation

18. The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to *monitor progress during implementation* in order to identify any problems and adjust the project accordingly.

19. *Evaluation at the end of a project* should aid lesson learning and exchange of experience between projects, and countries can consider project *impact* (for instance, in relation to use of statistics), *outputs* achieved (relevance, quality, accessibility) and/or *inputs* (efficiency and effectiveness), and *sustainability* (of systems put in place and capabilities developed).

20. The scale of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be appropriate to the size, duration and nature of the project.

21. Evaluations are normally best carried out by independent but knowledgeable experts.

22. Monitoring during project implementation is normally conducted through self-assessment by project partners.

X. Coordination

23. Coordination is needed to avoid conflicting projects, to seek synergy and to create optimal conditions for working together in partnerships, and is best achieved by:

(a) Making explicit which objectives, values and methods are shared by the partners involved;

(b) Establishing the exchange and sharing of information among the relevant partners;

(c) Coordinating the work of regional or subject matter working groups to ensure the exchange of information;

(d) Extending the exchange of information at the recipient level to other relevant organizations, such as the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance;

(e) Making coordination proactive to promote the design of joint or complementary projects and activities involving different donors and the recipient;

(f) Empowering the recipient national statistical system to play a key role in the coordination process.